"status" I believe has not been fully realized in our modern revival. Is the reverse true: is screwing up the humanist a step toward dogmatism? I doubt it—although in this world, to echo the sensible despair of Lardner, Marshall, and McClure, anything can happen. The humanist, in at least one major tradition, is a student of Ciceronian rhetoric—and therefore knows that rhetoric can be a double-edged blade, as useful to cut in one direction (pro) as in another (con) and that, consequently, things are capable both of appearing differently and of being perceived differently. The ease with which this knowledge can "serve any master" depends partly, as we've been told for centuries, on how many masters of rhetoric there are in the society we're talking about.

Thomas O. Sloane
University of California, Berkeley

Comments on John Trimbur's "Consensus and Difference in Collaborative Learning"

I do not wish to respond to Trimbur's entire essay (*CE*, October 1989) because I have had my own, rather long, say on collaborative learning and social constructionism in the Fall 1988 issue of *Rhetoric Review*. But I cannot ignore the first and second paragraphs in which Trimbur observes that "pragmatists see no reason to rescue the individual from 'normative communities' because in effect there is nowhere else the individual can be: consciousness is the extension of social experience inward"; that "pedagogies that take the

individual as the irreducible, inviolate starting point of education . . . inscribe a deeply contradictory ideology of individualism in classroom practice." Such pedagogies, says Trimbur, "constitute the student as a social atom." They represent a fear of students' abilities to work out collective norms; that they are, in reality, "teacher-centered and authoritarian" and so on. "In short," he concludes, in this portion of his essay, "the critique of consensus in the name of individualism is baseless."

This distortion of the theory and practice of a pedagogy with which I have identified myself strongly for the past quarter of a century frightens me. I am used to people disagreeing with me; I have not yet become accustomed to hearing from social constructionists, and Trimbur is not the first, that some concepts which I hold very dear, in effect do not exist. That is a new way of arguing, and to be frank, I simply cannot account for it. However, with apologies to Keats, let me try a "wild surmise." Suppose we hypothesize that the attempt to reduce the pedagogy which emphasizes the personal voice and the value of individualism to conceptual non-existence springs from a pathological fear so deep and so distanced from the conscious mind that its proponents cannot even trace it. I will gladly accept correction on this matter if I am far off the mark, but let me continue for the moment.

I wonder if Trimbur and others who enthusiastically endorse social constructionism came to their intellectual maturity during the 1960s, when both American society and the academic community were profoundly unsettled and disturbed by social turmoil and the

reaction to our participation in the Viet Nam War. (After speculating on this matter, I decided to do a superficial check on Trimbur's background. He received his B.A. from Stanford, I note, in 1968.) In young people's experimenting with drugs, radically challenging the social and sexual mores of our society, and even inciting riots and bombing campus buildings we saw individualism unrestrained. And we were justifiably horrified when such acts brought reprisals like the tragedy at Kent State. My memory of that era is that while it may have spawned collaborative groups which challenged established authority in a whole range of issues, it also spawned the destructive acts which were so disturbing to large numbers of people in our society, many of whom, like univerity administrators of that era, wanted nothing so desperately as some way of managing the chaos.

Trimbur should remember, however, that those of us who came to intellectual maturity during and immediately after World War II, had a profoundly different experience. We had seen, among other things, one of the most civilized nations on earth achieve "consensus" with a vengeance by making war upon all of Europe and attempting to exterminate an entire ethnic group. Where were those courageous and individual voices which should have spoken out against tyranny, against the cult of the state and all that implied in totalitarian societies? Where were the groups which should have nourished such social criticism? The books which captured our imaginations most vividly at that time were *1984* and *Brave New World*. If ever one sought consensus, he or she could certainly find it in Huxley's future state.

I do not, however, want to be unfair. Both individualism and social constructionism have their light and dark sides. I have already indicated the dark side of both. Now, the other. At its best, the idea of learning communities setting their agendas and, in effect, educating themselves is tremendously appealing. I am certain that, for some students, this mode of learning has been tremendously effective and beneficial. But it does not work for every student, some of whom, like myself, prefer to "sift and winnow" the ideas which we have generated or to which we have been exposed, quite far from the madding crowd. We do not discover our dissenting voices in collaborative groups, however constructed. Nor do we accept the notion, sometimes put forth by today's social constructionists, that internal colloquies, often stimulated by the presence of awe-inspiring natural phenomena, are a form of collaborative learning and a step toward consensus.

At the risk of further offending the author, I should point out that people in my camp struggle, with every sentence they write, to develop a unique style and, most certainly, to avoid the jargon that characterizes any academic community, especially one whose language is dominated by economic and mechanistic metaphors ("intellectual negotiation" and "the production of knowledge") and sentences whose meaning is nearly impenetrable: "Abnormal discourse is not so much a homeostatic mechanism that keeps the conversation and thereby the community renewed and refreshed. Instead, it refers to dissensus, to marginalized voices, the resistance and contestation

both within and outside the conversation, what Roland Barthes calls acratic discourse—the discourses out of power." Is this the same John Trimbur who wrote so lucidly on collaborative learning in Ben McClelland and Timothy Donovan's *Perspectives on Research and Scholarship in Composition*? Are there *two* John Trimburs?

Whatever the case, I wish the author of this piece would re-think his position on individual learning, personal voice, and the pedagogy which advocates it. In the classes of those who understand it, it is a liberating and self-actualizing experience for students, free at last to examine that which had been hitherto inaccessible and say what had always been repressed, not the manipulative and insidious form of pedagogical totalitarianism that social constructionists make it out to be.

Donald C. Stewart
Kansas State University

When I read the cover gloss, "critiquing collaborative learning," I thought that finally there would be a Husserl or Hegel to dissent from the Hume that has dominated the social constructionist rationale for collaborative learning. But instead, John Trimbur remains a Locke to Bruffee's Hume, and his conversation is closer to the coffee houses than he would care to admit. Trimbur's essay on Bruffee's theory of collaborative learning so clearly assents to his basic assumptions about human nature that it makes it difficult for me to focus on his political dissent: my attention is too distracted by phrases like "consciousness is the extension of social experience inward" (604).

I ask myself on what experience does Trimbur base his emphasis on differences as the dominant feature of human nature? Hume would certainly agree, but Husserl is left asking "where is my experience of transcendental consciousness?" Throughout the article, I kept asking myself why there must be exclusive attention to the parts of life at the expense of the wholeness of life, to the waves at the expense of the ocean? Only such exclusive attention could be powerful enough to transform consensus into its antonym.

In an age where quantum physics is systematically gobbling up metaphysics, conversations that remain exclusively on the level of the waves need re-grounding in the ocean. When Hume says, "I look inside myself and see no transcendental consciousness, only change, only difference," we need to consider whether the implication is "therefore transcendental consciousness does not exist for me" or "therefore transcendental consciousness does not exist, period." The latter stops the conversation; the former continues it.

I sometimes feel as if I were living in a time warp when I continue to see Rorty's quote about how there are no disciplines "devoted to a study of the unpredictable, or of 'creativity'" (607). In the same year in which I learned Transcendental Meditation, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, with an international research faculty, founded a discipline he termed the Science of Creative Intelligence (SCI). Only secondarily was the research lab for this science EEG machines and catheters. The primary lab was the mind, and its instruments were the mental techniques Maharishi had revived from the

ancient Vedic tradition of knowledge. The effect of these techniques has been systematically to culture in the Humes of this world the experience of transcendental consciousness referred to by the Husserls and Hegels. By now, with over three million individuals practicing these techniques in the world, there have been more than 450 empirical studies published in the Science of Creative Intelligence.

Today, quantum physicists are presenting theories of a completely self-referral, infinitely dynamic, self-sufficient unified field at the basis of the universe. The same description, but referring to transcendental pure consciousness, was made available in greater detail seventeen years ago in SCI by Maharishi, a teacher and scholar who is not only living the knowledge cognized by the ancient seers of the Vedic tradition but has revived their techniques for making this experience universally available. The existence of transcendental consciousness does not have to remain a matter of speculation.

Those of us who have been involved with this discipline for nearly two decades feel it is time for SCI to enter the mainstream of academic conversations. Introducing SCI into the collaborative learning conversation would reveal its root assumptions about (1) the nature of consciousness, (2) the relationship between subjective and objective approaches to knowledge, and (3) the existence of states of consciousness other than the ever-changing waking state. If this conversation could remain empirically based, it would make a fundamental critique of collaborative learning possible. In this conversation, collaborative learning would be still be found very useful, but for very different reasons than either Trimbur or Bruffee suggest.

Samuel Boothby
Maharishi International University

I want to thank John Trimbur for his thoughtful article on collaborative learning and "difference." It opens up in useful and illuminating ways several aspects of collaborative learning and social construction that I have not myself explored. I especially like the notion that consensus is not a point of rest but a point of departure from which to acknowledge and consider diversity and dissent—that is, a point from which to explore the overlapping and nested community membership of those in the consensus-making group.

I have a few reservations about minor aspects of the article. For example, Trimbur's thesis statement could be more precise. When he says that "Consensus . . . can be a powerful instrument for students to generate differences" (603), surely he means that it can be a powerful instrument for them to acknowledge differences, which is what he does say in fact at the end of the essay. Lord knows, we don't have to generate more differences. The problem is how to cope with the ones we've already got. Acknowledging them, as Trimbur says, is the first step in coping, followed by resolving those we can resolve, discovering constructive ways to exploit tensions among others, and negotiating a truce among those that defy resolution.

There are also, of course, some substantive issues on which Trimbur and I may not see quite eye to eye. Most of these are too complex to go into briefly. One example, however, is that

while I think that his redefinition of the term "struggle" is useful, it leads in a direction that not everyone who uses the term might find as appealing as I do. Trimbur says that struggle need not be regarded only as an external social and political exercise. It may also be regarded as an internal process—a "polyphony of voices, an internal conversation traversed by social, cultural, and linguistic differences" (609).

Psychologizing the term in this way helps me a good deal to understand why the word is such a staple of left-wing rhetoric. It also makes it possible to reconcile Trimbur's argument about collaborative learning and "difference" (that is, diversity) with what I take to be one of Roberto Unger's central claims. Unger's goal is to defoundationalize the assumptions of the political left. He begins that effort by acknowledging the risks inherent in all forms of "association." Becoming interdependent, relying on each other, can breed, in too many cases does breed, the "domination and dependence," the "depersonalization [and] bondage" that results from entrenched "ongoing, unaccountable, and unreciprocal power" (*Passion* 96–98).

I share the fear of suppression, constraint, and exploitation. At the same time, I agree with Unger that the extremity of our fear is not fully explained by the "confusion of . . . community and domination" expressed as "class struggle" and modes of "economic exchange." It is better explained by our radical ambivalence to one another. It is this radical ambivalence that gives rise to political and social conflict. That is, the price we pay to satisfy the human need to gain from each other "radical accep-

tance of [our] own selves" is fear of domination. We cannot avoid paying the price of fear. But we can avoid paying the price of domination itself, because we have means to deal with it.

Education is one of those means, provided that education itself is not an instrument of domination, dependence, and depersonalization. One of the virtues of collaborative learning is that it provides what Unger calls "an expanded sense of opportunity in association," a protected place where students "can undertake certain limited experiments in self-knowledge and self-reconstruction without risking material and moral disaster." Students need that protection because the "self-recognition" involved in cultural change—what we call "learning"—requires "relationships that impose a measure of vulnerability." As Unger succinctly puts it, "nobody rescues himself." Increased "opportunity in association"—through, for example, collaborative learning—can provide the "reliance and interdependence" required for constructive change, precisely because it can help minimize the risks of vulnerability in human association.

In short, the goal of collaborative learning, and Trimbur has usefully phrased it, is to stage conversations that allow students to experience the process of productive, ongoing, democratic, intellectual negotiation, with the result that their expectations about institutional life change and they think and act in more democratic ways. The educational goal of collaborative learning is productive, adaptable, human solidarity suitable to the needs of those engaged in it. Solidarity of this sort, Richard Rorty points out trenchantly, "has to be constructed out of

little pieces. . . . [It is not] found already waiting, in the form of an ur-language which all of us recognize when we hear it" (*Contingency, Irony, Solidarity* 94). Each collaborative learning event that teachers stage is one of those little pieces.

Another example of issues on which Trimbur and I may disagree has to do with Habermas's view that conversation in "business, industry, and professions" is regulated by "a 'success orientation' of instrumental control and rational efficiency." Now, it is possible that I don't understand the full, grim implications of that phrase. Perhaps it describes a way of establishing the "depersonalization [and] bondage" that results from entrenched "ongoing, unaccountable, and unreciprocal power." If so, it is possible that Trimbur is right that I have not taken sufficiently into account the effects of conversation regulated in that way.

But given my current understanding, it seems to me that once we have taken these possible effects into account, we still have to acknowledge that most good education is itself regulated by "a 'success orientation' of instrumental control and rational efficiency," and we have to acknowledge also that, in education at least, that form of regulation is not entirely a bad thing. It seems to me that we are in the business of teaching students how—successfully, instrumentally, rationally, and efficiently—to build bridges that really do hold up, make diagnoses that really do tell us why we hurt and that lead to cure, read texts in ways that really do make some kind of sense to the members of some community or other, write texts that really can get something across to the members of some community or other, and organize governments that really do promote the general welfare.

If so, then the question is not how to avoid or sabotage instrumental control and rational efficiency. The question is how to teach other people how to exercise it and thus give them genuine access to it. To do that seems to me to be something like what we mean by "empowerment."

So I think it is not misleading to tell students that learning to write through collaborative learning can provide access to the vernacular of instrumental control and rational efficiency. In any case, although I didn't have those terms at my disposal at the time, something like that is what I did set out to tell students, and teachers too, in a textbook I wrote some years ago called *A Short Course in Writing*. My notion, for better or worse, was that empowering students, whether or not we call it access to instrumental control and rational efficiency, is something collaborative learning is designed to do and can do. It is certainly something that traditional teaching is not designed to do, cannot do, and consistently fails to do.

On this last point, in any case, I suspect that Trimbur and I agree. We even agree on the alternative. What we disagree on are some of the details of that alternative and some of its implications.

Kenneth A. Bruffee
Brooklyn College

I have been reading—or mostly just skimming—*College English* with increasing irritation in the last several months, and finally I just have to protest. I find the magazine dominated by

name-dropping, unreadable, fashiona-
bly radical articles that I feel have lit-
tle to do with the concerns of most
college English teachers. I can't be-
lieve thay serve the audience that
NCTE is supposed to serve. I'm also
very concerned about the image of the
profession I think the magazine would
convey to the public if they read it
(thank goodness they don't!): that of
low-risk Marxists who write very
badly, are politically naive, and seem
more concerned about converting their
students from capitalism than in help-
ing them to enjoy writing and reading.
That isn't the image I want to present
to the public, and I don't think it is
one that serves our best interests.

   To cite some examples. A typical
sentence in "Relativism, Radical Ped-
agogy, and the Ideology of Paralysis"
by Charles Payne (October 1989) reads:

   Because hegemony depends on the
   masses' willing consent to the moral
   and intellectual leadership established
   by state and corporative leadership and
   because the established (though neces-
   sarily protean) web of institutions, so-
   cial relations, and ideas must be created
   and re-created throughout the society, it
   is necessary to convince the masses that
   the societal organization is objectively
   correct, in concordance with nature or
   at least with necessity.

Good lord, would you encourage your
students to write such Marxist jargon?
And do you think many readers of CE
have the interest or patience to wade
through such stuff? I don't.

   John Trimbur's article in the same
issue isn't much better. I like John and
I'm interested in his topic, but, when I
encounter writing like this, after two
pages I cease being willing to invest
my time in finding out what he has to
say. For instance:

   In this regard, the Habermasian repre-
   sentation of consensus as a counterfac-
   tual anticipation of fully realized com-
   munication offers students a critical tool
   to identify the structures of power
   which determine who may speak and
   what may be said.

Now really! And again, I don't at all ac-
cept John's assumption that the goal of
English teachers should be to indoctri-
nate their students in neoMarxism. I
know he says that's not what he wants
to do, but his rhetoric suggests other-
wise.

   Other impenetrable articles I've
chosen from the current *CE* are Lot-
to's "Utterance and Text in Freshman
English" (again, neoMarxist) and
Spellmeyer's "Foucault and the
Freshman Writer." I find both very
badly written, convoluted, and preten-
tious. Michael Prince's "Literacy and
Genre" is only slightly better. Joe
Trimmer's review of Mike Rose's
book was a wonderful breath of clarity
after that.

   Other items: Jim Berlin's "Rhetoric
and Ideology in the Writing Class"
(September 1988); Thomas Kent's
"The Rhetoric of Paralogy," (Sep-
tember 1989); Juncker's "Writing with
Cixous" (April 1988); Knoblauch's
"Rhetorical Constructions: Dialogue
and Commitment" (February 1988); Al-
corn's "Rhetoric, Projection, and the
Authority of the Signifier" (February
1987). These are just a few distressing
examples I pulled off my shelf.

   I don't think I'm just being cap-
tious. I hate to see the journal attempt
to elevate its standing in English de-
partments by publishing articles that
are as opaque and dull as anything in
PMLA or *Critical Inquiry*. And I'm
very concerned that the process favors
the young leftist radicals in the profes-

sion and leaves the mainstream behind. I can't help but believe that most of us want clear, thoughtful articles on reading and writing theory and on teaching, not articles that are larded with the fashionable names and terms but which, in my opinion, seek more to serve the ambitions of the authors than the needs of the readers. The journal should reflect the interests and needs of the whole Council and encourage and reinforce English teachers. I feel it no longer does that and that saddens me greatly.

I'll quit with a quotation from a *NY Times* interview with David Lodge, whose satirical novels about modern fashionable English departments could be a great corrective for some of the writers I've listed:

> [It is a] tragic irony that English and literary studies have reached a point in their theoretical development that they've become almost incapable of communicating to the layman at the very historical moment when they've most needed to justify their existence. The brightest, most innovative people in literary criticism are as impenetrable as nuclear physicists. The left-wing intelligentsia is trapped in a kind of ghetto that only they can understand and so can't bring any leverage to bear on the body politic.

Given my opinion of their ideas, I guess that's just as well. They write so badly that it's hard to take them seriously. Unfortunately, publishing their writing implicitly sets a model for the generation coming along. And I worry about what such writers and thinkers do to the writing and critical thinking standards of the graduate students who then teach freshman English. It's not a happy prospect.

Maxine C. Hairston
New York

John Trimbur Responds

I want to thank Donald Stewart, Samuel Boothby, and Kenneth A. Bruffee for their thoughtful comments. I would also like to make note of Harvey Wiener's article "Collaborative Learning in the Classroom" (January 1986). I mention Wiener as one of the leading voices in collaborative learning but neglect to cite this useful essay.

I urge those interested in Donald Stewart's critique of collaborative learning and social constructionist trends in composition studies to read his essay "Collaborative Learning and Composition: Boon or Bane?" (*Rhetoric Review* 7.1 [1988]:58–83). But on this point, readers should also see Mara Holt's reply to Stewart in "Towards a Democratic Rhetoric: Self and Society in Collaborative Theory and Practice" (*Journal of Teaching Writing* 8.1 [1989]: 99–112). I appreciate Stewart's efforts to draw out the political implications of collaborative learning, but I agree with Holt that Stewart's insistence on polarizing the individual and society—thereby making himself and other advocates of personal voice and self-actualization into the guardians of individualism and social constructionists its enemy—is both unnecessary and misleading.

Such a polarization, of course, is not unique to Stewart; if anything, it has been written into composition studies not only by expressivists such as Stewart but also by some who would locate themselves in the social constructionist camp. One of the least useful of the current debates about teaching writing is that which pits "personal voice" and "foundationalist" notions of the self against "discourse communities" and "anti-